

Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

Thinking at Right Angles: The Question of Neutrality

- Standards: II. Time, Continuity, and Change
III. People, Places, and Environments
V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
IX. Global Connections
- Grade Level: 9-12 (*Note*: incorporates movement and patterns, which the teen brain likes.)
- Objectives: The student will:
- Explain to peers the different views on neutrality emerging in the Early Republic
 - Fill in a chart citing the different views
 - Read key documents and summarize ideas to share with peers
 - Write a review of what was learned from documents and the peer exchange
- Time: 1 class period, after previous homework reading assignments
- Materials: Documents: **1793** *Washington Proclaims U.S. Neutrality*
1793 *The Pacificus–Helvidius Debate*
1794 *Neutrality Debate Newspaper Excerpts*
- Exercises: *Thinking at Right Angles Chart*
- Dictionary for “contravene,” “indemnification,” “depredations”
3 noisemakers (bell, horn, clicker, whistle, etc.)
- Procedures:

Setting the Stage

For the young Republic, almost every day seemed to bring a new diplomatic crisis.

President Washington worried that European rivalry over the Nootka Sound on the far Pacific Coast would force the United States to support France, Great Britain, or Spain—and make enemies of the other two. The violent revolution sweeping France split American sympathies—including those of the President’s closest advisors—into opposing camps. The President tried desperately to steer a level course as both the British and the French seized trade goods and detained ships en route to Europe.

Passionate emotions were aroused, and political positions were often at “right angles” to each other. Once the President issued a Proclamation of Neutrality, a war of pamphlets between Alexander Hamilton (Pacificus) and, at Jefferson’s urging, James Madison (Helvidius) began. In time, partisan newspapers showed those “angles” to the public as well.

This lesson will take a look at the differences argued in debates, in the press, and in the minds of President Washington and two of his key cabinet members who represented the Jeffersonians and the Federalists.

Pre-Lesson

1. Distribute the three documents for homework reading asking the students to write key IDEAS in the margins of the documents as they read, called marginalia. (It would be most helpful if the documents were numbered by lines; students can do this as well) Also remind them to use their textbook or the Internet to acquire background information on the times about which they are reading. This could be assigned two days ahead of time.

Lesson Day

- 1.** Ask students to get out their notes and review quickly what they have jotted in the margins: Are these ideas???? Make them ideas!
- 2.** Hand out one *Thinking At Right Angles Chart* to each student and ask them to note what they think Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson and the American public were thinking about an impending war. Write those ideas in the appropriate boxes (Left side, columns A–D) on the sheet.
- 3.** After all have finished, students will move around the classroom with their *Thinking at Right Angles Chart* and a pencil to listen to what their peers have discovered.

The teacher should then demonstrate all three noisemakers.

- The *first* sound means students should move to a new person.
- The *second* sound means one of the two will begin explaining what he or she has recorded.
- The *third* sound indicates that the other person now talks.

Give each round approximately four (4) minutes and complete at least five (5) rounds.

- 4.** While listening to each other, students should take time to write down any new ideas they hear in Column E.
- 5.** After all rounds are completed, ask the students to return to their desks and re-read their notes in Column E. Ask them to share any ideas that were new or different from their original insights. Follow with class input and discussion.
- 6.** At the end of discussion ask the students to summarize the thinking of the political leadership on the question of neutrality in Column F. They can add more than the space suggests.
- 7.** The teacher will collect each sheet and record the ideas that were shared for a short review at the beginning of the next lesson.
- 8.** Include a question about the differences in political thought and position on the next test or add a reflection question asking who they thought was thinking most realistically under the circumstances.

Extension Activities:

Have students research any of these topics:

1. The Nootka Sound Controversy
2. The request of Lord Dorchester of Canada for troops from the United States
3. The British refusal to honor key parts of the Treaty of Paris
4. The fall of the Bastille in Paris
5. The ship *Swift Packet*
4. The Anglo-French War in Europe
5. Why the Neutrality Proclamation uses the word "impartial" instead of "neutrality" ■